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SUCCESS STORY

Airstrip Improvements Help Open Path to Peace in Abyei



Heavy machinery was used to improve and extend the Agok airstrip, enhancing access to Sudan's troubled Abyei region.

USAID/OTI responded swiftly after the signing of the Abyei roadmap agreement, rehabilitating the Agok airstrip in collaboration with the Government of Southern Sudan to improve access to the crisis-stricken region.

October 2008 – The crisis-stricken region of Abyei is situated along Sudan's fiercely contested north-south border. The area is served by a single airstrip some 30 miles south of Abyei town in the village of Agok, and the airstrip is particularly important during the rainy season when roads are impassable. The runway, however, was prone to flooding and too short for anything but the smallest planes.

Last month, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) collaborated with the Government of Southern Sudan to fund the rehabilitation and extension of the Agok airstrip. Today it has two new layers of compacted material that enhance rainwater runoff and drainage and enable all-season

access. In addition, the runway was lengthened to 1,200 meters to accommodate larger aircraft.

Eager to move goods and services destined for Abyei, the United Nations began operating flights via Agok before the rehabilitation was fully completed. Now the airstrip provides the United Nations, international nongovernmental organizations, and other actors improved access to the region.

The improvements to the Agok airstrip come after a protracted deadlock over the region's boundaries that, in May, led to fierce fighting that destroyed much of Abyei town and displaced more than 50,000 residents. The subsequent vacuum in governance paralyzed the post-conflict transition that was laid out by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005.

The airstrip improvements not only advance efforts to address the urgent needs of the victims of the recent violence but also support the establishment of a local administration in accordance with the recently signed Abyei roadmap agreement. And the appointment of an Abyei Area Administration in early October has created a nationally recognized partner with whom international organizations can partner to put the region on the road to recovery.

USAID/OTI continues to support the efforts of local authorities to address the causes and consequences of violence and political neglect in Sudan's most contested region.